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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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Office of Current Intelligence

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The "Liberation" of Tibet

The announcement by the Chinese Communist Government of the signing of an agreement on 23 May with the Tibetan delegation in Peiping, defining the status of Tibet, presages the extension of effective Chinese Communist control over the area. The agreement makes it clear that Tibet is to be an integral part of Communist China. Although the intentions of the Dalai Lama and his circle are unknown, their alternatives are either to implement the agreement, depriving themselves of all significant power, or to flee. The Peiping regime is certainly capable of introducing its military forces into Tibet. Although Communist occupation of Tibet will constitute a potential threat to the northern frontier of India, the Indian Government does not appear prepared to support actively any group in Tibet opposed to Communist control.

In October 1950 the Peiping regime ordered units of the 2nd Field Army to "march into Tibet," and at the same time notified the Tibetan authorities to send delegates to Peiping to discuss "peaceful liberation." At first, the dominant faction of the Tibetan Government was apparently disposed to resist. However, by the end of 1950, Chinese Communist forces had advanced through western Sikang to a point approximately 300 miles from Lhasa, where they have remained; in this period, Peiping claimed that its forces had "completely wiped out" the "main force" of Tibet, stated to be 5,700 troops. Chinese Communist propaganda, combining menacing with conciliatory gestures, contributed to the ascendancy in Lhasa of elements favoring accommodation to Peiping; this provisional government was left in control in December 1950 by the Dalai Lama, who removed himself to a town near the Indian border where he is still located. The Tibetan delegation in New Delhi, which had been engaged in preliminary conversations with Communist China's Ambassador to India, was instructed to proceed to Peiping, and arrived there in April 1951, its chairman having stated en route that he intended to accept Peiping's definition of Tibet's status.

The agreement reached in May provides that "the Tibetan people shall return to...the Motherland" and that the "return" shall be ensured by a military occupation, with the Tibetan authorities contracting to "actively assist the People's Liberation Army to enter Tibet and consolidate the national defenses." The Chinese promise of "national regional autonomy" to Tibet is negated in the same phrase by the provision that such "autonomy" is to be exercised "under the unified leadership" of Communist China.

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Peiping's promise not to alter the status of the Dalai Lama is rendered equally meaningless by provisions for the reinstatement of the Panchen Lama (under Chinese Communist control since 1949) to his former authority, which would make him in fact superior to the Dalai Lama. The agreement further states that Peiping is to have absolute authority over "all external affairs" of Tibet, that Tibetan troops are to be absorbed by the "People's Liberation Army," and that local "reforms" are to be initiated by "the people." The agreement finally provides that, "in order to ensure (its) implementation," Communist China is to set up a Military and Political Affairs Committee and a Military Area Headquarters in Tibet.

Chinese Communist commentaries on the agreement indicate some doubt as to whether the Tibetan authorities will implement it. Although Peiping repeatedly cites the "full powers" of the Tibetan delegation, it is not known whether the Dalai Lama or the provisional authorities in Lhasa authorized the delegation to sign the agreement, or whether they intend to abide by it. The Dalai Lama and other Tibetan authorities, who have made no public statement on the agreement, are reported to be aware that Peiping's promises are worthless and that they cannot expect to hold other than temporary or nominal power under the Communists. On the other hand, the Tibetans are presumably aware that they cannot expect outside assistance, other than possible sanctuary in India or elsewhere if they should choose to flee.

Despite the difficulties presented by the Tibetan terrain and climatic conditions, the Peiping regime undoubtedly has the capability of extending its military control over Tibet. More than 450,000 troops are disposed north and east of Tibet, and an estimated 30,000 of these could be introduced into Tibet. Remaining Tibetan forces total at most 5,000; these forces, lacking numerical strength, materiel, morale and modern warfare techniques, could at best offer limited guerrilla resistance. While the Tibetan ecclesiastical power is an obstacle to Communist political control, Communist experience with ethnic and religious minorities in several other border areas -- including the Tibetans of Southwest China -- suggests that the Communists will steadily consolidate their political as well as military control.

The terms of the Sino-Tibetan agreement, much stiffer than India had anticipated, have led that country to review the Tibetan situation with renewed interest and may lead it to accelerate steps already taken to strengthen its eastern defense by establishing control points in certain border areas. Publicly, however, India has expressed the view that there is nothing to be done about Tibet, and has stated that it will not press the matter of Tibetan autonomy if, as India assumes, the Tibetans do not. India does not appear prepared actively to assist the Dalai Lama if the latter chooses to oppose Peiping.

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The extension of Chinese Communist control over Tibet will be of some advantage to the international Communist cause. Although the Chinese are not expected to invade northeast India and adjacent territories from Tibet, the military threat posed by 20,000 to 40,000 Chinese troops will serve Peiping's political purposes. Tibet's economic resources are insignificant with the possible exception of exploitable mineral resources; a Soviet mission has reportedly surveyed this question, with unknown results. The northern frontier of India will undoubtedly be vulnerable to political exploitation: the Kashmir dispute may attract Peiping's interest, and China may choose to support opposition elements in Nepal, engage in subversive activity in Sikkim, and renew its historical claim to Bhutan. Communist control of Tibet will consolidate control of all religious sects of Lamaism in Tibet, in the Mongolias and in the USSR.

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